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ABSTRACT

The evaluation and placement of rehabilitation clients has been problematic. In addition to physical and emotional problems, these individuals suffer from a variety of unique handicaps. With this in mind, a program was developed to assess the present abilities and future potential of such a client to perform certain work tasks. Subjects were public assistance recipients who expressed interest in receiving vocational assistance. The program was generally seven weeks long during which time the client had the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of work tasks. Through the use of work modules designed to simulate work activities in entry level jobs, such qualities as judgement, perseverence, coordination, and dexterity could be observed by the trained evaluators. In addition, the program was designed to simulate real work settings where clients were expected to follow normal work routine. Followup data and client reaction indicate that the program has been productive in aiding high risk clients in assessing their present ability to perform in a competetive job market. (Author/HMV)

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A PROCESS MODEL FOR VOCATIONAL EVALUATION OF HIGH-RISK REHABILITATION CLIENTS

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Introduction

The evaluation and placement of the rehabilitation client has been problematic. The diversity of disabilities has created a need for a variety of assessment techniques and special considerations concerning the specific disability of the individual client (Genskow, 1970). However, even under the best of conditions, most research indicates that placement success rarely exceeds 50% (Sankovsky, 1969). During the middle and late sixties, the additional problems facing the economically and socially deprived were recognized. In addition to the physical and emotional problems facing the general rehabilitation client, these individuals suffer from a variety of unique handicaps including language deficiency, poor educational background, lack of vocational training, lack of work experience and little motivation for work (Amos, 1968).

With this in mind, a program was developed through the New York State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and a private rehabilitation facility to assist the disadvantaged in developing vocationally. The program was designed to assess the present abilities and future potential

of the client to perform certain work tasks, as well as their ability to function in a work setting. The purpose of the program was to aid the rehabilitation counselor and the client in determining the client's readiness for immediate job placement or additional training.

Methods

Subjects

The subjects were public assistance recipients living in an inner city environment, all exhibiting in addition to physical or emotional problems that impeded employment, such problems as limited education, poor work history, involvement with drugs and probation and generally poor socialization patterns. These clients were referred primarily by the local welfare office, but also by other involved agencies such as probation, private social agencies or physicians, after the client indicated interest in receiving vocational assistance.

Program Structure

Through generally a seven week program, a client had the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of work tasks. In addition to the trained evaluators, each client had frequent contact with a behavior specialist and a rehabilitation counselor. In the last two weeks of the program, a job placement counselor provided a more specific orientation to job interviewing techniques, completion of applications and job referrals.

The primary emphasis of the program is on the individual and his uniqueness, as well as his immediate needs/problems and constant action in aiding him in dealing with these problems (i.e. welfare,

housing, family arguments). The rationale being that vocational planning/action can be part of an ongoing life process, which anticipates the problems the client will face and helps the client prepare to deal with these problems in a more effective manner. In dealing with each client as an unique individual, a warm and supporting atmosphere aided in developing a sense of family where the direction and success of each client was important to everyone.

Through the use of work modules, which are designed to simulate work activities in entry level jobs, such qualities as judgement, perseverence, coordination and dexterity could be observed by the trained evaluators working with the clients. There are approximately fifty modules (constantly being developed to meet the individual needs of the clients). Some examples of work modules currently in use include: clerical, health aide, soldering-welding, mechanical, and supermarket check-out and inventory. Work modules were designed to simulate the work activities in entry level jobs in a variety of local industries.

In addition, the program was designed to simulate real work settings where clients were expected to follow normal work routine such as punctual attendance, use of time-punch clock, and use of established times for breaks and lunch, and developing good peer and supervisor relationships. Dissemination of occupational information and the exploration of values, attitudes, aptitudes and interests also composed part of the counseling process. In addition, crisis counseling focused on those immediate problems which were likely to impede the client's progress in the evaluation process (i.e. need for medical treatment, assistance in obtaining adequate financial support, family

crisis, etc.). Counseling, through both individual and group sessions is an important component in dealing with vocational planning, personal crisis situations and work adjustment problems. In conjunction with the counseling, audio-visual equipment is utilized to assist the clients in reviewing and assessing their behavior in various settings.

Results

The program began in August, 1973, and as of the cut off date for this study, January 15, 1974, 38 clients had completed the evaluation process and were theoretically ready for job placement or additional formal training. The follow-up conducted during the middle of March, 1974, indicates that of the 38 clients, 16 were successfully placed in jobs and still working, 10 were in formal training, and 12 were for various reasons neither working or in training. Those clients in jobs were either in entry level employment or semi-skilled jobs, often through the utilization of on-the-job training, where the employer and OVR shared in the payment of the client's salary during an initial period of training.

Those clients participating in training were generally in programs of one year duration or less (i.e. cosmetology, electronics-TV-radio repair, tailoring, business school). The majority of this group had fairly defined vocational goals from the onset, however, appeared to need reassurance that these goals were realistic in terms of their capabilities and the job market. Because of the pre-existing condition of more defined vocational goals, this group's vocational success was more likely.

Those who failed to either complete the program, or to enter employment or training after completion of the program, presented a variety of problems, such as incarceration, increased health problems and most usually, inability to make personal adjustments to a work setting. A major problem in dealing with many in this group was the lack of availability of good community psychiatric therapy to aid them in dealing with their more long-term and deviating behaviors.

Discussion and Conclusions

The reactions and behavior of the clients add a major dimension of support for the process model being studied. The following represent some general conclusions drawn by the authors concerning client reactions and/or behavior in relation to the major components of the evaluation process (work modules; simulated work setting; and specialized counseling, including vocational planning and crisis situation counseling.)

Work Modules

It appeared that the majority of the clients responded favorably to the opportunity to perform work tasks that were similar to future job possibilities. The most popular work samples appeared to be those that allowed the clients to perform real tasks with observable results (examples—hairdressing unit, manicuring nails, styling another client's hair; painting, including planning, buying materials and carrying out the job). In several incidents, individual clients had initially rejected or complained about certain work module tasks as appearing to be boring or unrewarding (i.e. nail wighing, lock assembly, ink-pen

assembly). However, due to the evaluation component (i.e. necessary use of reasoning and judgement to complete tasks) this initial reaction appeared to result from the client's inherent fear of failure.

Simulated Work Settings

Client reaction to this aspect of the evaluation process was related to the client's ability to deal with work adjustment problems. The closer to reality, the more useful these settings were, since they provided a somewhat realistic potential work setting and gave the client an opportunity to react to that situation. The feeling was that these simulated settings, in conjunction with the work modules, provided a good pre-screening as to job attractiveness prior to job placement and/or formal training.

Counseling

Much of the material for vocational planning/counseling developed out of experiences the client was having in other aspects of the evaluation process (i.e. work modules and simulated work settings). Many of the clients had a long history dealing with a variety of agencies (i.e. welfare, schools, courts), where an established pattern of failure had developed. For this reason, many of them began the evaluation process with an ingrained fear of failure and a disposition to quickly reject any potential work activity. In some cases, these reactions were intensified by the work modules and simulated work settings. Counseling provided clients with an opportunity to explore and redefine these feelings and reactions.

The clients' reactions to counseling can be judged as favorable based on the frequency of client initiated counseling contacts, which

over the course of the evaluation process increased dramatically. The quality of these counseling interactions also improved as the clients developed self confidence and a positive self concept as well as an increased trust in, and reliance on the counselors.

Both client reaction and the follow-up data appears to support the conclusion that the outlined program has been productive in aiding high risk clients in assessing their present ability to perform in a competitive job market. Considering the compound nature of the disabilities of these clients, a 68% success rate must be considered relatively good. One problem obviously is the short-term nature of the follow-up. Certainly it is possible that when a one-year follow-up is made the percentage will change. If past research is a good indicator, the success rate is likely to decline, however the authors feel any such decline will be minimal. In addition, it must be recognized that the atmosphere of the program and the staff was highly supportive of each individual and a great deal of emphasis was placed on developing acceptable behavior patterns.

It should be noted that in reviewing the cases of the clients, the follow-up data seemed to indicate consistent patterns for those who were employed as compared to those who sought formal training. The majority of the group of those who were employed were initially unrealistic or had non-existent vocational goals. In addition, throughout much of the program, they appeared to have the most difficulty in dealing with crisis situations (ie. welfare grant suspension, probation-court problems, family realtions). Of this group, a number professed an interest in formal training, however, due to the reality of financial needs, immediate employment became an interim goal. In addition,

a majority expressed an interest in receiving training through night school (while in jobs) however, only one has followed through to date. Perhaps by developing a structured follow-up program the necessary support could be provided to aid in this further planning.

Finally, this group displayed the greatest number of problems dealing with the simulated work setting (i.e. peer relationships, taking instructions from the evaluator, completing work modules, attendance).

Those clients participating in training initially appeared to have formulated vocational goals. In addition, crisis situations did not appear as often, and their personal lives appeared to be more organized—this group tended to be more independent and responsible. These characteristics tended to aid them in better dealing with financial problems and to delay gratifications, until formal training could be completed.

The group which failed to develop defined vocational goals appeared to be most resistent to a structured work situation. Their personal problems and social behaviors were such that they were unable to deal with organized planning at this time.

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